

Acts 3:1-10

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Peter and John encounter a lame beggar in the temple courtyard. He asks them for money, but instead of giving him silver or gold, Peter heals the man of his disability in the name of Jesus. The man leaps about and follows Peter and John, praising God. Nearby crowds see this miracle.

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. The ninth hour was 3 p.m. It is the same hour in which Jesus died. It is at this hour of prayer when Jesus prayed “Father, INTO YOUR HANDS, I COMMIT MY SPIRIT” (Luke 23:44-46). That Peter and John were going up to the temple to pray shows that Peter and John still practiced the Jewish religious rituals that they grew up with. Being believers in Jesus did not tear them from their Judaism. The apostles were not attempting to start a new religion. Rather, they were discovering the full meaning of their existing religion, where God’s promises were coming true. God had promised a Messiah to come and restore Israel, and Jesus was that Messiah (“anointed one”). Jesus was the Son of God, who came to earth to give humanity a new spiritual life, and a mission to fulfill (Matthew 28:18-20).

Even the Apostle Paul continued to follow the law out of devotion and respect, but not to find righteousness from it (Acts 25:8, Galatians 2:16). So much of what the Old Testament prophesied has finally happened, and *Peter and John* had witnessed it, and believed. But the majority of Israel missed it. They saw, but did not believe. Peter will confront a crowd about their failure to recognize God’s Messiah and will urge them to repent and return to God.

The temple in Jerusalem, built by King Herod, was absolutely enormous (see illustration in the Maps and Charts section). The Beautiful Gate was the gate into the inner temple complex. The average person could go into the courtyard, such as Peter and John going in at *the hour of prayer*, presumably to pray. But only the priest could go into the temple building itself. So at the Beautiful Gate, *Peter and John* enter the courtyard, *and a man who had been lame from his mother’s womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple.* Friends or relatives of the *man* were carrying him to his usual place to sit in the outer part of the temple, probably in the shade of the colonnades, or “Solomon’s Portico” (Acts 3:11).

Similarly, during Jesus’s ministry, there was a paralyzed man carried on a stretcher who sought healing from Jesus, which he received (Luke 5:18-25). This *man who had been lame from birth* in Acts 3, since he could not work due to his lameness, sought charity. Since hundreds of Jews passed through *the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful* every day, it was a strategic spot to *beg alms*. When *Peter and John* encountered this *man who had been lame from his mother’s womb*, he was *being carried along*, probably by friends who were taking him to his normal place at the Beautiful Gate.

When the lame beggar saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms just as he did from everyone walking nearby. It seems perhaps the lame man was

asking for *alms* before he even got settled. Here at the *hour of prayer*, the lame man is asking/praying for help. He will get help, but in a much bigger way than he expected.

But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on the lame man and said, "Look at us!" This seems to show that the man begged in a constant, general way, calling out to any nearby, and perhaps had already begun calling out to other people so as to maximize the amount of charity he might receive that day. But Peter, probably moved by the Spirit, calls for the man's specific *attention*. And the beggar *began to give them his attention*, because he was *expecting to receive something from them*. Interestingly, this is the nature of *prayer*. We ask, hoping to receive something. This was the man's daily routine, sitting each day in the *temple* courtyard. He likely had friends bring him at the *hour of prayer* because there were larger crowds, and he could expect to receive from other men.

But God, through *Peter*, is going to change this man's life. *Peter* tells the lame man, *I do not possess silver and gold*. He has nothing that the world deems valuable to give the man. He has no money, nothing of *silver and gold*, to give away. And quite possibly *Peter* literally had no money with him, because the apostles were not men who accrued wealth, but lived by sharing what they had with other believers (Acts 2:44-45). Yet, Peter does have a gift for the lame man, *but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!*

Peter commands the man to *walk*, something he cannot do naturally because he is *lame from his mother's womb*. From the day he was born to this day, he has never once walked. But Peter declares this healing *in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene*, and then *seizing the beggar by the right hand, Peter raised him up; and immediately the lame man's feet and his ankles were strengthened*. Strength given from God heals this man's lameness. The progression from not being able to walk to suddenly having strong feet and ankles and being able to stand is miraculous enough, but then the overflow of God's healing shows itself in the man's ability to *leap*. No longer lame, the man *stood upright and began to walk*. He walks with Peter and John as they carry on their way. He *entered the temple with them, healed, walking and even leaping* all the more. He jumps about, amazed that he can do so, joyous, and he directs this joy and amazement to the One who deserves it, *praising God*.

This man understands that this is a work of God. He is a Jew. He understands where power comes from, so he praises *God*. In Chapter 4, it is revealed that this healed man is in his forties (Acts 4:22). It is possible he had begged in the temple every day for the past ten or fifteen years, or more. He has been a recognizable feature in the temple. Most of Jerusalem is familiar with this man, and so this healing is about to create a stir because everybody sees that a famously lame beggar, a staple of the temple courtyard, is now able to not only walk, but to leap.

The power that flowed through the Apostle Peter also flowed through the Apostle Paul years later when he healed a man in Lystra, a city in modern-day Turkey, though in those days it was the Roman province of Asia (Acts 14:8-11). In Paul's instance, the man who was healed didn't praise God. Since Paul was in a pagan city when he healed a lame man, the crowds declared that Paul was a god. They believed he was a god become man and come down to work miracles for them. So Paul had the opportunity to point to the true God who performed the healing (Acts 14:15).

Since Acts is written by Paul's ministry companion, Luke, it seems likely that Luke chose to include this episode of Peter healing a lame man at least in part to demonstrate the validity of Paul's apostolic authority, which was under constant attack from Paul's opponents. Peter, an apostle to the Jews, healed a Jewish lame man. Paul, an apostle to the Gentiles, healed a Gentile lame man. Each of them leapt. This demonstrates that God authenticated Paul's ministry, just as He did Peter's.

Here, this healing creates for Peter the same opportunity the healing did for Paul; they each get to preach the gospel. Peter takes this moment of healing as a chance to preach that God came down from Heaven and became man for our benefit. His preaching will be to the Jews, so will resemble John the Baptist's admonition for them to repent. They already believe in God. However, they are not following God's ways.

This healing scene did not go unnoticed: *all the people saw the healed man walking and praising God*. Acts 4:4 tells us that two thousand believers were added to the early church after Peter's sermon here in Acts 3; whether they were all in audience there or if the message spread by word of mouth, we can at least surmise that there were hundreds, if not thousands, of people in the temple at this particular moment.

It was something so incredible that it interrupted everyone from what they were formerly doing: *they were taking note of him (the lame man) as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him*, having been healed and restored to being able to walk. Here in the temple, during the *hour of prayer*, a lame man asks to be blessed, and through Peter is blessed by God in a way he could not imagine. In the same way, the Jews have been asking God to send a Messiah, so they can gain a physical blessing (like alms), to free them from the Roman occupation, but God sent something much greater. He sent Jesus to heal them spiritually (John 3:14-15).

Word of this miraculous healing must have spread quickly beyond those who had seen it happen. People saw him *leaping*, and *praising God*. They probably asked one another, "Isn't that the man that's always begging by the temple gate? The man who cannot walk and has to be carried here each day? He's walking! He's jumping!" Understandably they were filled with *wonder and amazement*. But they did not know where to direct the *wonder and amazement*, as the healed man did. He looked to God in gratitude for saving him from his malady. The people look to Peter and John, and in the following verses Peter rightly confronts them about their failure to grasp God's actions in Israel of late—particularly with respect to Jesus.

We can speculate as to the reasons Luke included this moment in his book of Acts. There were eyewitnesses to the healing. It took place in the most central, important location for Jewish life in Israel at the time. It validates the succession of Jesus's ministry. Jesus delegated His authority to the disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). They are now beginning to do the same sorts of things Jesus did. But they are not doing it in their name, but in the name of Jesus. So everybody sees this miracle. No one can deny it is the same type of miracle done by Jesus, and nobody can cover it up. Though some will try. Including this episode also set up for Luke to validate Paul's authority as an apostle, since he also healed a lame Gentile man, in an event that parallels this one.

Biblical Text

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer.² And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple.³ When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms.⁴ But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us!"⁵ And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.⁶ But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!"⁷ And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.⁸ With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God;¹⁰ and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.